

THE MIZAN NEWSLETTER

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The Mizan Newsletter aims at giving an objective and balanced account of current Soviet writings on the Middle East

The first article in this issue examines Soviet writing on Soviet Aid to Middle East Countries, which is one of the foremost topics in Soviet writing on the Middle East today. Soviet contentions are, partly, that Soviet aid is basically altruistic - that its aim is to promote human welfare and world peace - and, partly, that it is basically a commercial proposition and has no ulterior motives. However, the tone of Soviet writing on the subject is so sharply anti-Western as to suggest that Soviet aid is in fact inspired by anti-Western motives.

The Ba'th Party and Arab Nationalism recalls the history of Soviet dislike of pan-Arabism, of which a recent example is an article by L. Viktorov in SOVREMENNY VOSTOK denouncing aspects of Arab nationalism in the UAR.

Topics in Soviet Angle on the News are the split in the Iraqi Communist Party; the Israeli-UAR frontier incidents; and a PRAVDA attack on Persian foreign policy.

SOVIET AID TO MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

A considerable proportion of current Soviet writing on the Middle East consists of accounts of Soviet aid to Middle East countries. This reveals two main Soviet preoccupations: to emphasise the scale of Soviet aid, and to explain its character and motives. ("Aid" in Soviet usage covers trade, loans, technical co-operation and indeed all economic relations between an under-developed country and the USSR.)

Resumption of a Leninist tradition Soviet writers frequently affirm that the Soviet Union's economic relations with under-developed countries constitute "international relations of a new type". A. Korotayev (VNESHNYAYA TORGOVLYA No.5 of 1959, pp.43-44) connects this with the five principles of peaceful co-existence and equality between nations. Other writers, however, prefer to emphasise continuity and consistency in Soviet policy, and claim that these "new relations" spring from the essence of the October Revolution itself but have in some cases (as in the Middle East) only become practicable since the political "liberation" of under-developed countries in recent years. V.Rymalov, for instance (INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS No.9 of 1959, p.23) declares that "the policy of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries is determined not by transient or tactical considerations", and that "even before the October Revolution Lenin ... pointed out that socialist countries would render unselfish material and cultural assistance to backward and oppressed peoples".

Soviet writers might, indeed, point out that the matter went further than declarations by Lenin. At the Second Conference of People's Commissars of Foreign Trade in 1923 it was resolved to give eastern countries "active support in increasing their productive power, as a pledge of our determination to participate in the regeneration of the East and to draw the peoples of the East struggling for their independence closer to the USSR, and as a means of fighting and destroying the colonizing propensities of the capitalist West". The arguments and language used by the exponents of Soviet aid today are remarkably similar.

During the Stalin period there was no room for projects for the economic development of the eastern countries. But in 1952, in his own ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM, Stalin outlined a new economic policy which, while not referring specifically to under-developed countries, resembled the Soviet economic offensive of today in its aggressively anti-capitalist character. Stalin maintained that the economy of the capitalist world was now nearer to its inevitable collapse, whereas the Communist bloc would soon have a large surplus for export to the rest of the world - which, he implied, would still further aggravate the "crisis of capitalism".

Stalin's successors quote Lenin, not Stalin, as the authority for their present-day policy of economic aid to the under-developed countries; but, while not following Stalin in claiming that the economy of the capitalist world is about to collapse, they nevertheless maintain that Soviet aid to the under-developed countries operates against the interests both of foreign capital and of the "private sector" in these countries.

The character of Soviet aid Soviet writers indignantly repudiate the term "economic offensive" as applied in the West to Soviet trade and economic aid initiatives. But the polemical tone of Soviet literature on the subject seems to make the term particularly appropriate. In these writings the description of Soviet economic relations with the under-developed countries seems virtually inseparable from denunciation of the capitalist countries' economic relations with them.

It is claimed, first of all, that there are "no political or military strings" attached to Soviet aid. It is of course easy to point to Middle East countries which are both recipients of Western aid and military allies of the West, and one is represented as the consequence of the other. Further, it is claimed that Soviet aid promotes the creation of an independent national economy in formerly dependent countries, and, above all, is directed to their rapid industrial development - "the thing", says D.Byeloshapkin of the Arab countries (INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS No.7 of 1958, p.42), "which they need most to preserve their recently won independence". Capitalist credits, the argument goes, mean dependence; credits from the socialist countries mean independence. The effects of the two on the domestic economy are also widely different. Rymalov (op. cit.) says:

"Soviet credits above all promote the development of the state sector of the national economy, which represents the strongest basis for the genuine independence of under-developed countries. The credit policy of the Western imperialist circles is diametrically opposite in nature. Its chief purpose is to reinforce the dominating positions held by foreign monopoly capital in these countries. In a number of cases it is also designed to support those sections of the local bourgeoisie and big landowners who seek to prevent badly needed basic economic and social reforms."

The favourable interest rates of Soviet loans (2-2.5 per cent) and the long dates for repayment are emphasised, and it is claimed that these terms put the Western countries at an acute disadvantage. For Soviet technical assistance, as opposed to Western, many advantages are claimed; one that receives frequent mention is the advanced training given to local technicians, with the aim of ensuring that the recipient country can operate the new undertakings with its own personnel.

The Soviet Union is also contrasted with the West as a trading partner. It is claimed that the Soviet Union benefits a country by breaking the West's monopoly of its exports. It is also claimed that the USSR offers better prices; does not foist unwanted goods on its customers; and is free from the recurring economic crises of the West, which upset trade.

The scale of Soviet aid In publicity for Soviet aid much is made of Soviet economic expansion as forecast under the Seven-Year Plan. Khrushchev, it is pointed out, has predicted that by 1965 the industrial output of the socialist countries will account for more than a half of world industrial output. N.Semin comments (SOVREMENNYY VOSTOK No.1 of 1959, p.8):

"In this way the absolute superiority of the world system of socialism over the capitalist system in material production will be assured. This will create for the countries of the East unprecedented opportunities of extending their purchases of essential requirements on favourable terms, and will still further restrict the possibilities for their exploitation by capitalist monopolies."

Meanwhile Soviet writers dwell on the present extent of Soviet aid to the Middle East countries and on the growing place which it occupies in the economy of these countries and in their national planning. G.Prokhorov (VNESHNYAYA TORGOVLYA No.4 of 1959, p.4) says that nearly 50 per cent of the UAR's industrial development plan is covered by Soviet credits. A.Krasinov (SOVREMENNYY VOSTOK No.4 of 1959, p.8) says that the share of the socialist countries in Egypt's external trade in 1957 amounted to 36 per cent, and that these countries bought 67.5 per cent of all Egypt's cotton exports in 1957/8. D.Byeloshapkin (op. cit.) says that Soviet credits have made it possible to envisage completion of Egypt's five-year industrialization plan in three years; that the industrialization plan will give work to some half a million men and women; and that industrial training centres organized in Egypt under contracts with the USSR will have accommodation for 4,000 trainees. However, to emphasise the magnitude of Soviet aid to the UAR Soviet writers now need only point to the Aswan High Dam agreement and the credit of 400 m. rubles provided by the USSR for financing Soviet work on the project.

Articles on Soviet-Iraqi economic relations have appeared recently in Soviet trade and other journals. In VNESHNYAYA TORGOVLYA No.11 of 1959 M.Postolenko said that the Soviet Union occupied a leading place among Iraq's export customers: "already Soviet foreign trade organizations have bought up almost all available Iraqi exports of cotton and small hides, and nearly a half of all available wool." In SOVREMENNYY VOSTOK No.7 of 1959, P.A.Maletin, deputy head of the Soviet foreign

trade administration, said that the factories (13 in number) to be built for Iraq by the USSR would be "the basis of Iraq's industry".

In short, the literature which has grown up around Soviet aid to Middle Eastern countries seems calculated above all to impress the reader with the extent to which these countries are now economically dependent on the Soviet Union - while at the same time the reader is constantly assured that it is only thanks to Soviet aid that these countries have completed their political independence by achieving economic independence of the West.

The motives of Soviet aid A leader in VNESHNYAYA TORGOVLYA No.2 of 1959 defined as follows the motives for Soviet aid to under-developed countries:

"In giving economic and technical aid to economically under-developed countries, and in providing them with credits on favourable terms and developing trade with them on a mutually profitable basis, the Soviet Union is guided by the sole desire of accelerating the revival of these countries, hastening the development of their productive forces and by these means promoting the rapid improvement of the well-being and culture of the peoples of these countries."

Similarly V.Rymalov (INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS No.9 of 1959, p.24) says that "in giving aid the Soviet Union does not base itself primarily on considerations of commercial advantage" but "considers such aid important and necessary both from the standpoint of humanity and the solidarity of all mankind, and from the struggle for peace and peaceful co-existence between countries with differing social and political systems". The expressions "unselfish" and "disinterested aid" are a commonplace of Soviet writings on the subject. Equally, Soviet writers deny that the Soviet Union is engaged in a "trade offensive" designed to corner markets. B.Pichugin (INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS No.10 of 1959, p.71) says: "These contentions are absolutely groundless... Greater Soviet participation in international trade leads to an overall growth of commerce and offers other countries additional opportunities of marketing their goods." Rymalov quotes Khrushchev as saying, of Soviet trade with the under-developed countries: "In selling our commodities to these countries we are not prompted by the profit motive... We do so not because we need to export machines but because some countries ask us to assist their economic development." Yet, in his speech to the XXIst CPSU Congress on 27th January 1959, Khrushchev said of Soviet aid: "We are not a charitable institution. The Soviet Union gives aid on fair commercial principles." (Quoted by M.Kocharyan in an article on Soviet-Indian economic co-operation - SOVREMENNY VOSTOK No.7 of 1959, p.4.) Thus, according to the Soviet account, Soviet economic aid is prompted by non-commercial motives, although concern is shown to maintain economic relations with under-developed countries on a proper commercial basis.

Soviet writers also deny that the Soviet Union hopes to gain any political advantage from its aid programme. Krasinov indignantly denies Western notions that the Soviet Union wants to "capture" the under-developed countries by means of trade and aid. Rymalov says that the Soviet Union is not motivated by "tactical considerations".

Obviously, however, it is in the political field that one must look for the motives of Soviet aid, and these indeed are at least implicit in Soviet writings. Pichugin says: "In its relations with the capitalist countries the Soviet Union utilizes economic contacts principally as an important lever for strengthening peaceful relations and establishing the desired confidence between states with different social systems." This is an admission that the main object of trade and aid is to win the political favours of non-Communist countries. That the aim is to do this at the expense of the West is never explicitly admitted, and indeed is denied. But when for example Pichugin represents the under-developed countries as faced with a choice between Soviet aid and "begging favours from the colonialists and... being resaddled with old-time colonial relationships", it is clear that there is a tacit understanding between Soviet writer and Soviet reader that the matter under discussion is the economic and political ascendancy previously enjoyed by the West, which the Soviet Union wishes to replace with a new scheme of things designed to operate in its own favour.

THE BA'TH PARTY AND ARAB NATIONALISM

By a coincidence, SOVREMENNY VOSTOK of January 1960 publishes a vehement attack on the Ba'th Party just at a time when in the Syrian region of the UAR the Ba'th Party's fortunes seemed to have reached their lowest ebb, with the resignations of Ba'thist Ministers from the UAR Government. That this is a coincidence is apparent from the fact that the January issue of SOVREMENNY VOSTOK went to press on 21st November 1959, and the ministerial resignations were announced on 30th December.

The Soviet attack is perhaps rather to be connected with the hostile attitude of the Syrian Communists towards the Ba'th Party, which was expressed by Khalid Bakdash at the XXIst Congress of the Soviet Communist Party on 2nd February 1959. Khalid Bakdash complained that the Ba'th Party leaders were protagonists in the anti-Communist campaign in the UAR (MIZAN NEWSLETTER No.2 of 1959, p.2 and Appendix A, p.9). Now, in an article entitled "Ba'thists in the Service of Reaction", L.Viktorov attacks the Ba'th Party on two counts - first for its anti-Communist attitude, and secondly for its "ultra-nationalist" and pan-Arab policies. In doing this Viktorov must have been aware that he was at the same time attacking the policies of President Nasir himself. His article is to be

seen in the context of the attacks on aspects of Arab nationalism which have been made by Soviet writers and spokesmen - including Khrushchev himself - at intervals since January 1959; and these are more easily understood in the light of the traditional Soviet hostility to pan-Arab movements.

Soviet suspicions of Arab nationalism The Small Soviet Encyclopaedia, published in 1930, described pan-Arabism as an ideology of the national bourgeois intelligentsia which was used by Britain against Turkey in the first World War. This attitude towards pan-Arabism was perhaps influenced by Soviet hatred of pan-Islamism, as being an instrument which enemies of the Soviet Union had tried to use against it in its early days. Soviet writers indeed noted the striving for Arab unity, but were hostile to projects for its realization, for fear that these would promote the interests and influence of the Western powers in the Middle East.

An appreciative Soviet view of Arab nationalism developed only very slowly after the second World War. By 1952 indeed the existence of a specifically Arab "national liberation movement" was noted (in an article by V.B. Lutskiy in VOPROSY ISTORII No.5). In 1955 (SOVETSKOYE VOSTOKOVEDENIYE No.5) L.N.Vatolina examined "the growth of the national consciousness of the peoples of the Arab countries", but said nothing of Arab strivings for political unity; she still envisaged the situation in terms of class struggle, and of leadership of the national movement by the proletariat. In 1957 (SOVETSKAYA ETNOGRAFIYA No.1) Lutskiy published a remarkably comprehensive appreciation of the theoretical bases of Arab nationalism and the Arab unity movement, and wrote enthusiastically of Soviet support for Arab unity; but later the same year (SOVETSKOYE VOSTOKOVEDENIYE No.5), in an article on "The October Revolution and the Arab Countries", we find him writing not of the ideals of Arab nationalism but of the growth of the working class in the Arab countries, of the spread of socialist ideas, and of what he calls "the spontaneous craving for socialism among the Arab masses and all progressive forces in Arab society".

The ideological limitations of the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Arab nationalism began to appear more sharply after the establishment of the UAR in February 1958. Soviet welcome for the UAR was not unqualified. Its creation was in fact welcomed, as an "anti-imperialist" move; but it was pointed out that the Arab unity movement could be used for purposes contrary to the interests of the people. In an article on the UAR in INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS of March 1958 K.Ivanov insisted that the trends within the Arab unity movement which would "triumph in the long run" would be those "which are most closely associated with the people". The Soviet attitude to Arab unity was a realistic one, said Ivanov: "being Marxists we are by no means inclined to make a fetish of Arab unity as such and to ignore the fact that the idea may, in certain circumstances, be used for some time also by the reactionaries, who seek to arrest the

progressive development of the Arab peoples. The possibility of zigzags and backtracking, to say nothing of play-acting, is not to be excluded in the eastern national movements of our day." Here was a reaffirmation of the basic Soviet misgivings about Arab nationalism.

Nasir's campaign against Communism and his attitude to Iraq were decisive for the Soviet attitude to Arab nationalism. The basic document in this connection is Khrushchev's address to the Iraqi economic delegation on 16th March 1959 (MIZAN NEWSLETTER No.4 of 1959, appendix). Khrushchev said that Nasir's ambition to make Iraq a part of the UAR was not realizable in the face of the opposition of the peoples of the countries concerned; and he denounced the "measures to suppress freedom-loving aspirations" in the UAR. The following passage most sharply expresses Soviet disillusionment with Arab nationalism:

"It is said that Arab nationalism supposedly stands outside the interests of separate Arab States, and outside the interests of different classes of the population of Arab countries. Undoubtedly the interests of the majority of Arabs are indivisible in the struggle against the colonial yoke. But after a country has freed itself from foreign domination the interests of the people cannot be ignored. The interests of all the Arabs cannot coincide. Therefore attempts under the flag of nationalism to ignore the interests of separate classes of the population and the interests of the working people are futile."

But, even before Khrushchev's speech, Soviet writers had been reconsidering the ideal of Arab unity. In INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS No.1 of 1959 K.Ivanov repeated, perhaps more sharply, the reservations on the subject which he had expressed on the occasion of the establishment of the UAR: "as Marxists", he said, "we are by no means inclined to make a fetish of Arab unity as such, or even more of pan-Arabism". He also spoke of "the pan-Arab verbosity of certain Arab statesmen", without mentioning any names. Thus the traditional Soviet dislike of pan-Arabism again comes to the fore.

An attack on UAR policies The present attack on the Ba'th Party embodies the main charges already made by Communist and Soviet spokesmen against the Nasir regime. The Ba'th Party leaders are accused of depriving the people of their democratic freedoms in the name of Arab unity - that is to say, suppressing Communism - and of interpreting Arab nationalism in such a way as to create tension between Arab countries - that is, between the UAR and Iraq. The charges of persecuting the Communists in the UAR and of conspiring against national unity in Iraq are in fact particularized.

More surprisingly, however, the Ba'th Party are accused of making common cause with domestic reaction and foreign imperialism:

"The Ba'th Party leaders stand out as enemies of social change and reform in the Near and Middle East. The slogans of the Ba'thists in essence express the aims and objectives of the reactionary elements in the Arab countries and their foreign inspirers... Their hatred for the socialist camp and for everything forward-looking and progressive betrays them."

Soviet writers have recently shown a marked sensitivity towards pro-Western manifestations in Arab public opinion (MIZAN NEWSLETTER No.11 of 1959, pp.2-3), and perhaps the above is another reflection of this anxiety lest Arab neutralism should lose its anti-Western content.

One phrase in Viktorov's article is perhaps worth remarking. In 1955 Vatolina wrote an article on "the growth of the national consciousness of the Arab peoples". Today Viktorov in his article speaks of "the growth of the national and class consciousness of the Arab peoples". The addition is significant; Soviet pronouncements on eastern national movements increasingly emphasize the role of the working class in them, and disparage nationalism.

SOVIET ANGLE ON THE NEWS

Below are reviewed reports on Middle East events appearing in Soviet newspapers and periodicals during the period 7th February - 6th March.

The Iraqi Communist Party On 13th February PRAVDA published a four-column account of the party programme submitted by the (then) Communist Party of Iraq to the Iraqi Minister of the Interior, in accordance with the requirements regarding the licensing of Iraqi political parties. The fact that the party was refused a licence was not intimated to Soviet readers until 18th February, when PRAVDA reported that the party - that is, the Communist group led by Zaki Khayri - had changed its name to "People's Union Party", but that this meant no change in its programme or in its attitude to what Zaki Khayri called "the opportunist and subversive group of Dawud as-Sa'igh, which has appropriated to itself the name of Communist Party". Zaki Khayri's article of 16th February in the party organ ITTIHAD ASH-SHA'B, setting forth his party's claims to be recognized, was published in PRAVDA of 22nd February. On 1st March PRAVDA quoted ITTIHAD ASH-SHA'B articles on (a) desertions from Dawud as-Sa'igh's group, and (b) the support for Zaki Khayri's group reflected in recent Soviet newspaper articles: "in this way the Communist Parties in the

socialist camp as well as in the Arab countries criticize the conduct of the opportunists, call it by its proper name and denounce those who direct it".

The present situation of the Iraqi Communist Party was referred to in an article by Y.Bochkarev, "Report from Baghdad", published in NEW TIMES No.9 of 1960. The Iraqi Government, said Bochkarev, had objected to certain formulations in the party's programme, and these objections the party's leaders had accepted without discussion. However, the party had now had to change its name, since the Government had given recognition to a so-called "Iraqi Communist Party in its Legal Form". Bochkarev remarked: "Until this January no one had ever heard of such a party. It simply did not exist. Now it is the signboard behind which a small group of people far removed from the Communist ideology are hiding."

The dismissal of Ibrahim Kubbah Soviet newspapers published no comments on the dismissal of Ibrahim Kubbah from his Iraqi ministerial posts. IZVESTIYA of 18th February, reporting the dismissal, noted that no reasons for it had been given.

The second anniversary of the UAR PRAVDA and IZVESTIYA published special dispatches from their Cairo correspondents on the occasion of the second anniversary of the UAR, 22nd February. Much was said about the economic progress achieved by the UAR in the first two years of its existence, and about Soviet economic aid ("despite the different approach of the USSR and the UAR to ideological questions", to quote from an article in KRASNAYA ZVEZDA by F.Seyful'-Mulyukov). In PRAVDA I.Belyayev said that "the guarantee of the UAR's successes in the creation of a powerful national economy, independent of foreign dictation, is its economic and technical cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries".

The Israeli-UAR frontier Reports and articles on the Israeli-UAR frontier situation blamed Israel for the existing tension. KRASNAYA ZVEZDA of 5th February said that, according to the JERUSALEM POST, a decision to "clear the demilitarized zone of Syrians" had been taken at a meeting of the Israeli Cabinet on 31st January; and, in this way, "the Ben Gurion Government deliberately proceeded to a new aggressive action against the UAR", in the attack on the village of Tawafiq on the night of 31st January - 1st February.

IZVESTIYA of 7th February published an article by its Cairo correspondent Kondrashov, who with a group of foreign correspondents went in an aircraft specially provided by the UAR authorities to visit the scene of the incidents on 3rd February. After speaking of the plight of the Arab

inhabitants of the demilitarized zone, Kondrashov observed: "The swash-buckling character of Israeli military circles is well known. In Israel a campaign is being openly waged for launching a so-called preventive war against the Arabs. Israel is in the grips of a war psychosis." An IZVESTIYA article of 6th March on the same subject, signed "Observer", accused Israel of "sabre-rattling" and deliberate provocation; in Israel, it said, the theory was being propagated that existing weapons and armaments should be put into use before they became out of date.

Soviet-Persian relations On 14th February PRAVDA published a 3,000-word article, signed "Observer", entitled "Where are the forces of reaction dragging Persia?" This gave an account of Persia's dealings with the Western powers on the one hand and with the USSR on the other; portrayed Persia as rapidly becoming a "semi-colony" and a military appendage of the USA; and voiced warnings about the results of this policy, of which the following are examples:

"The Soviet Union has more than once warned Persian ruling circles that Persia will have to pay dearly for their complicity with the colonialists. Experience has shown how justified were these warnings, uttered as they were in the interests of the people and of the restoration of good-neighbourly relations between our countries."

"The military bases in Persia, directed against the USSR, have no decisive strategic significance. The Soviet Union, as is well known, possesses all the necessary means to wipe these bases off the face of the earth, if aggressors dare to unleash a war. The establishment of military bases threatens the country which consents to their establishment."

"In his blind hatred for Communism, dreaming of leading an alliance of all reactionary forces in the Middle East against the national liberation movement and against all Persia's peace-loving neighbours, the Shah drags his country further down the road to the abyss. Should he not pull himself up before it is too late?"

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